



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **HEADS OF LOPEZ DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION SENTENCED**

LAREDO, Texas — Two brothers, who had been charged in a federal indictment in July 2004 as the heads of a drug and money laundering organization, were sentenced here today to more than 20 years each in prison, announced U.S. Attorney Chuck Rosenberg, Southern District of Texas. The case was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and other federal agencies.

Noe Lopez was sentenced to serve a term of 24 years, and Simon Lopez was sentenced to serve a term of 25 years imprisonment, for their roles in the drug conspiracy. Their sentences also include five years of supervised release following their eventual release from prison. In addition, the two were also sentenced on a money-laundering conspiracy charge to terms of 20 years each and were assessed a joint and several forfeiture judgment of \$15 million.

According to the evidence presented by the Government, the forfeiture money judgment of \$15 million represents the amount of drug proceeds laundered by the Lopez drug trafficking organization during the course of the conspiracy. In handing down the sentences, the Honorable Judge George P. Kazen commented to the defendants and their attorneys that this is one of the most massive cases he has ever presided over during his quarter century as a U.S. District Court Judge.

Noe and Simon Lopez pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute in excess of 1,000 kilograms of marihuana, and in excess of five kilograms of cocaine, and conspiracy to launder money. In addition, the two brothers agreed to a joint and several money judgment of \$15 million, which according to the Government represents the amount of drug proceeds laundered by the Lopez drug trafficking organization.

During the sentencing hearing, the Government presented evidence that established that the conspiracy spanned an eight-year period beginning in 1996 and continued through 2004. According to the Government's evidence, Noe and Simon Lopez were the heads of a drug and money-laundering organization that was primarily based out of Laredo, Texas, and largely operated in the Atlanta, Ga., area. The evidence presented further established that during the course of the conspiracy, Noe and Simon Lopez shipped more than 150 kilograms of cocaine and more than 30,000 kilograms of marihuana from Texas to Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee.

According to the Government's evidence, Noe Lopez and Simon Lopez participated in laundering as much as \$15 million in drug proceeds. The bulk cash was often transported from Georgia to Laredo, hidden within the walls of igloo ice chests. The laundering of drug proceeds took various forms to include: wiring money via western union, bulk shipment of money in vehicles, use of drug proceeds to pay for drug debts, airline tickets, leases on vehicles, rent on apartments, homes and warehouses, hotels and cellular telephones used to promote the carrying on of the Lopez drug-trafficking activities.

Noe and Simon Lopez were the main targets of a four-year long Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation headed by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Criminal Investigation, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The investigation was dubbed "Operation Igloo" due to the organization's repeated use of Igloo ice chests to hide hundreds of thousands of drug proceeds.

In July 2004, a federal grand jury in Laredo returned an indictment charging Noe and Simon Lopez, along with 25 of their criminal associates, in a 12-count indictment for their role in a drug and money-laundering criminal enterprise.

Immediately following the indictment, Simon Lopez and 22 others were rounded up with the assistance of multi law enforcement agencies to include: DEA, IRS, ICE, U.S. Marshals, the FBI, the Texas Department of Public Safety, and the Laredo Police Department. Noe Lopez remained a fugitive until his arrest in November 2004 when he was located by DEA Atlanta agents hiding at an Atlanta residence. Noe Lopez had considerably changed his appearance, having dyed his hair blond and assumed a false identity. A total of 24 of the 27 persons charged in the July 2004 indictment are now in custody. The three remaining fugitives are Jesus Moreno, Juan Erasmo Rodriguez and Jose Felix Fierro, aka "El Gallo."

The indictment charged the alleged members of this drug and money-laundering organization with various federal violations, including engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise, conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute large kilograms quantities of marihuana and cocaine, conspiracy to launder drug proceeds, and numerous other controlled substances violations. The alleged illegal conducted occurred during an eight-year period beginning in 1996.

In addition to the two drug king pins, 28 other co-conspirators have pleaded guilty, and have been sentenced on various counts of drug and money laundering violations including:

Francisco Antonio Cansino, aka "Tony"; Sergio Barragan; Gerardo Garza, aka "Jerry"; Jesus Del Angel Saldivar, aka "Chuy"; Jose Angel Solis; Michael Lafayette Cayruth, aka "Mike"; Robert Leonard McDow, aka Louis Shagville Johnson, aka "Chavez"; George Paul Corosine, aka "Deejay-G-O"; Noe Lopez Jr.; Adriana Laura Cortez; Jorge Ibarra, aka "El Morro"; Andrew Rubalcaba; Leon Rubalcaba; David Vasquez; Juan Ibarra; Eleuterio Liendo; Ricardo Villarreal; Juan Antonio Trevino; Juan Montalvo Flores; Arturo Vidales; Jorge Vidales-Aguilar; Juan Manuel Pena; Victor Manuel Pena; Jesus Gonzalez; Jaime Galvan III; Jose Alberto Flores and Felix Lozano.

Noe and Simon Lopez' sentences mark an end to an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional investigation that spanned over a four-year period, and resulted in the arrests and convictions of co-conspirators who resided and ran operations for the organization in the Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, area; Laredo, Texas, area and Atlanta, Ga.

Overall the investigation resulted in a total of 30 convictions, the seizure of several million dollars in cash, and multi-ton seizures of marihuana in the States of Texas and Georgia. The last co-conspirator awaiting sentencing is Robert Leonard McDow, aka "Chavez," whose Laredo indictment was transferred to Atlanta for a plea and sentencing. The law enforcement agencies that spearheaded the investigation included: the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary Lou Castiilo prosecuted the case.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*